



STREET

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Contrapposto: Taking a Stance on Jason Rhoades

Where the ICA's new exhibition really isn't pushing boundaries.

By EMILY GRABLUTZ

Of the four multimedia installations included in the ICA's new exhibition, "Jason Rhoades, Four Roads," the most striking is "Untitled (from My Madinah: In pursuit of my ermitage...)." The work consists of dozens of neon words hanging from the ceiling from orange extensions cords. Visitors are invited to remove their shoes and wander beneath the installation. "Untitled" is visually captivating, and it offers a uniquely intimate way to experience art in a museum setting.

But I felt very uneasy as I read the dangling words: "Breakfast of Champions." "Beggar's Purse." "Fuck Hole."

Because **they're all slang terms for vaginas.**

Suddenly standing there under all these genitalia euphemisms felt disgusting. Maybe I was taking it too seriously; maybe I was just supposed to giggle at the phrases "Pink Turtleneck" and "Penis Holster" and move on. Still, I couldn't shake my sense of ickiness.

According to the ICA's website, Rhoades' work deals with breaking taboos, and the artist is known for "the provocative audacity of his vision." Some other titles in his body of work include "Birth of the Cunt" and "Black Pussy Soirée Cabaret Macramé," so "provocative" seems fitting. But Jason Rhoades is a straight male artist. **Is it really "provocative audacity" for a straight male in our society to throw around objectifying terms for vaginas?** That's not so different from your average fratty Fling tank.

So what was Rhoades' intention with "Untitled"? His language seems to indicate that he saw it as a kind of altar, his way of glorifying vaginas—and hopefully, by extension, the human beings attached to those vaginas. The description calls it Rhoades' "Mecca," referring to the holiest city in the Muslim faith. Its title references Medina, another Muslim holy city, as well as "ermitage," or a place of religious seclusion.

Not only is it extremely offensive for a white, non-Muslim man to equate his light-up vagina den with the holiest locations in the Muslim world, but, ew. I don't feel glorified or honored by this. I feel objectified and creeped out. By building a personal "holy city" out of vagina euphemisms, the installation reduces vagina-having people to one body part, rather than being full human beings.

I'm all for art pushing social boundaries, but **"breaking taboos" isn't interesting when it only reinforces sexist ideals.** I can see these same sleazy phrases on items at Spencer's Gifts—I'm not impressed by some dude hanging them up and calling them "art."